

## GUIDES TO UNCHARTED LANDS AND SEAS

*Guide to Shipping and Free Passenger Records*; and *Guide to Records Relating to the Occupation of Crown Lands* (Guide to the State Archives of New South Wales, Nos 17 and 18) prepared by Dawn Troy for the Archives Authority of New South Wales, Sydney 1977.

Reviewed by JUDITH CORDINGLEY

THOSE WHO attended the dinner marking the Inaugural Conference of the Australian Society of Archivists may remember the hasty address given by Professor Manning Clark. His subject is no longer clear in my mind but he spoke with lively and affectionate remembrance of a lady who had presided over a certain archival institution where he was researching the subject of Governor Arthur. The research had apparently not been going well until one day when, just as despair was getting the upper hand, this lady appeared from the inner archival recesses and triumphantly, but carefully, placed a document before him. 'There!' she said, 'There's your Governor Arthur!' The perspicacity and dexterity of this sibyl drew from those hearing the tale a collective sigh of envy and admiration. At the same time, this archivist's heart sank. Incoherently she thought, 'But that's not what archives is'.

For what archives is she bids you turn to the *Guide to the State Archives of New South Wales* which has been appearing in sections since 1960 and has been widely distributed. The latest two sections, numbers 17 and 18 in the series, appeared in 1977 and are the second and third subject guides in the series, dealing respectively with *Shipping and Free Passenger Records* and *Records Relating to the Occupation of Crown Lands*. Both were prepared by Dawn Troy B.A., Dip. Lib., of the Archives Office of New South Wales, and I really do stand amazed at her perspicacity and dexterity and more so at her consistency of approach and capacity for sheer hard slog.

The series is published by the Archives Authority of New South Wales but in these subject-oriented guides an obvious effort has been made to include in the listing records and publications in other institutions, such as the Mitchell Library and the New South Wales Branch of the Australian Archives, which are relevant to the subject and to records held by the publishing body. How comprehensive this effort has been I cannot tell but no one could claim that it was common practice in this country for an archival institution to take even the beginnings of such a broad and sensible approach. The motivation appears to be the desire to assist researchers and further their research, an idea even less countenanced in some quarters.

It is here with respect to the type of assistance given to researchers that the contrast in methodology lies. It can be a heady and delightful experience to make oneself the medium by which that long-sought and desired record materializes out of the ether to speak to the suppliant researcher with his own voice. But, apart from the fact that archives are generally extremely mundane and the opportunity to dance attendance on greatness rarely lightens the day of the ordinary

archivist on the lower floors, such practices do nothing to contribute to the researcher's understanding of the nature or contents of the document in that particular instance nor to the sum total of archival order and accessibility. We have all known the archivist who was an absolute whizz at producing the odd case or file from 'his' records but who never told anyone else how to do it and never never wrote anything down. Come his well-deserved retirement and those fascinating items are lost again until some browsing archivist or researcher unearths them and establishes exclusive rights over them.

On the other hand these Guides to shipping and lands records bring the researcher to his subject with some awareness of the provenance of the records he is using and some understanding of the factors, legislative, administrative and so on, which caused them to be created. If he then discovers a record containing the fact or nuance which illuminates his purpose he is also in a position to assess the reliability of the information and to be aware of its relationship to other circumstances.

The approach taken by each of the Guides varies slightly. The shipping records have been organized into sections dealing with arrival and departure of vessels, arrival of free passengers, departure of passengers, crew lists and registration of colonial vessels. Most of these have sub-sections and within each the series are listed chronologically. There are in addition two appendices dealing with the arrival of immigrant ships at Sydney, Newcastle, Moreton Bay and Port Phillip over varying periods. At the beginning of each section a short discussion establishes the historical perspective and the description of each series notes the type and purpose of information in the records, the physical form of the record, the location or reference symbols, the existence of indexes and shelf lists and in some cases the relationship to another series and a comment on the relative usefulness of each.

The lands records are listed in one chronological sequence introduced by a summary and explanation of the main legislation and regulations controlling the occupation of crown lands up to the Crown Lands Act of 1908. The records themselves span the period 1824 to 1949. The various series are described in a similar fashion to the shipping records, with a number of more expansive notes on the origin and management of a particular series, or the implications of the information contained in it. In some few cases the description of a series is not particularly informative. I note with a shudder such cryptic entries as 'Lands: Occupation Licence Files, 1886-1927, 300 cartons'. I can imagine those cartons! But such an entry serves to draw attention to the enormous amount of work in processing and understanding the records which lies behind most of the entries in these Guides.

Their primary function, as stated in the preface to each, is 'to allow research workers to trace the arrival in and departure from the colony of persons other than convicts . . . and the movements of vessels' and 'the history of the occupation of a particular portion of land, and on a wider scale, the settlement and development of particular

regions'. These seem to me to be very particular objects of research to be approached with the assistance of the Guides alone. One envisages the amiable receptionist at the Archives Office thrusting the appropriate Guide onto the hapless researcher, pointing him in the right direction and urging him to 'Go to it'. Obviously supplanting the archivist is not the purpose for which these Guides were framed. Many series would be quite inaccessible to the novice enquirer in these areas whose basic information is frequently restricted to personal facts, recollections, family legend and the like. Explaining the relationship between series, the use of control records and selecting the most likely opening is the business of the archivist and must be performed in an active sense.

But in carrying out these functions what an asset Guides such as these must be. To put the researcher in the picture and keep the archivist in the picture and to put them on a more equal footing so that the archivist is neither oracle nor handmaiden, the researcher neither beggar nor lord—this must promote within any public archives which shows such respect towards its records, its researchers and its staff as these Guides indicate, an intelligent and fruitful use of public records by the public to whom they belong.